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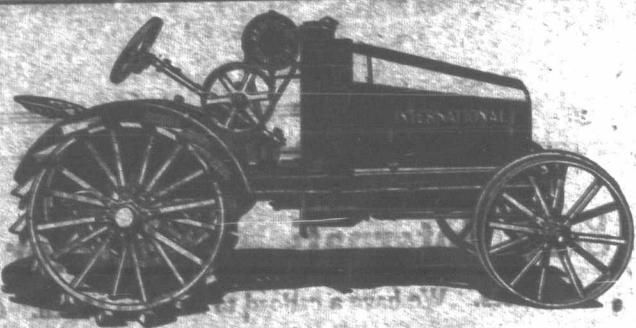
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SUSAN or KEZIAH?

By LAWRENCE PERRY

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Judge Tom Crane put the last shutter over the front window of his store, closing the bar across and snatched the padlock. Then he turned and gazed thoughtfully along the turnpike to where a single light glimmered through a grove of cherry trees. The judge always became sentimental at this hour of the evening. As a matter of fact he was in love and, what is more, admitted it to himself. This takes rare courage sometimes, but it takes even more courage under certain conditions to admit it to any one else. That was what bothered Judge Crane.

The judge was not much over fifty years old. His store, the one town store, yielded good profits. He was a bachelor, not a widower; was well preserved, a former judge in the town court and always a deacon. Oh, no; he was not ashamed of his personal aspects. The trouble was that he was not quite sure with whom he was in love. There were two of them—two maiden sisters, Susan Appleby and Kezia Appleby. Both of them appealed to Judge Crane in one way or another, and for ten years he had been trying to decide which one appealed to him the more. But thus far his efforts had yielded him little satisfaction.

He paced thoughtfully up and down the porch, with his hand locked under his coat-tail. He closed his eyes, and the picture of Kezia drifted slowly across his mind. It was in church that he loved her most. He could see her now in her pew just in front of his. Her shoulders did not come very far above the high back seat, and a few curls straggled from under the black bonnet. One eye was hazel, the other a watery blue, and her hands were folded demurely in her lap. She wore a black waist cut down a little at the throat and edged with lavender silk and lace, and she had a humorous little smile at the corners of her mouth. On Sundays the simpler was allowed to fade, but the telltale lines remained.

There was no nonsense about Susan—tall, straight, angular, her bonnet perched up straight on her head like a grenadier, blue eyes and a straight, tight shut mouth. She could say things, and she got up church societies and missionary societies. Judge Crane sighed.

A few minutes later he unclasped his hands and transferred them gleefully to the armholes of his vest. He had come to a decision. He would consult a third party. Whom? There were two he had in mind, Zebulon, the brother, and Matilda, the eldest sister, a widow. All in all, he thought Zebulon would be the better of the two. Yes, he would go to his old friend and confess all. He would secure information as to the qualities of both from the standpoint of one who had spent his life with them, and he would also make inquiry as to which one would most likely award his suit with a favorable answer.

"Hello, Zeb!" It was Zebulon himself who stumped up the steps and sat down at the top with a grunt. "Nice evening."

"Hello, Zeb—um—yes, a tolerable evening. How air ye?" And the judge seated himself beside the prospective adjutant of his destiny.

"About as well as a man kin be with a parcel of women folks about him all the time," grumbled Zebulon, filling his pipe.

"What's the matter of 'em?" queried the judge, apparently unconcerned.

"Matter?" snorted Zebulon. "Matter? Why, everything's the matter. Ef it ain't one thing it's another—sewin' societies, home-cleaning, visitin', church, prayer meetin', entertainin' the parson an' talk, talk, talk, nothin' but talkin' from sunrise to supper. Bah! Women is well enough in their places, but three on 'em is too darned much. Two on 'em old maids too! Why don't Providence send some one to marry 'em? It ain't right, it's ag'in nature, for one man to be married so."

"Um—well, that is kind of bad, Zeb. I'm sorry they're riled ye, because I was just a-goin' to ask yer honest opinion which one to pick out. I'm a-goin' to get married if I kin." And Judge Crane blew his nose vigorously.

"Arrump! Huh!" Zebulon sat up. The judge set with his jaws tight and his eyes stared fixedly into the road. Zebulon snorted again and regained his self-control. Had heaven smiled on him at last? Had he said too much? He knew whom he wished married. Kezia would do, but Susan was the one to whose wedding he would dance all the way. He recalled her mastery ways, her trenchant tongue. Was it to be settled for him by the bonds of matrimony? He turned to the judge.

"Well," he said, drawing his handkerchief across his eyes, "I kin talk an' growl, but when the pinch comes, judge, I don't see how I kin live without 'em. Kezia is good, judge, but Susan, she is the one for ye. I know. She wants to get married. She said herself 'twould soften her, although Lord knows she don't need it. She's got an' kind an' lovin' an' she's got a good an' kind mind—a good strong mind. Yes, sir, I recommend Susan," concluded Zebulon.

"Well," said the judge, "ye ought to know, Zeb. Wants to get married, does she? Well, she would a' been long ago had I not been afeared to ask her. I'm scared yet, Zeb, to tell the truth. What I want is the ice broken, eh? Zebulon was too overjoyed to stop at anything which might strengthen the judge in his quest. He actually offered to take the judge to his sister, state the



Will Morning Never Come

DOES this illustration picture your experience?

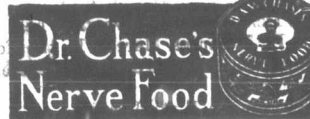
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case and then leave the two alone. For reply the judge rose decidedly to his feet. "Come," he said.

So they trudged along the road together, Zebulon quietly radiant, the judge stern and determined.

Ten minutes later they entered the Appleby house. A raucous, twangy voice came from the parlor.

"She's in there," whispered Zebulon, and he pushed open the door and entered with his hand reaching back holding the skirt of the judge's coat.

"How d'e do, judge?" they exclaimed, rising. But the judge made reply by pushing Zebulon forward.

"Susan," said Zebulon, flushing guiltily. He knew Susan could see right through him. "Susan," he repeated, "ah—ahem. The judge here—well—ah—"

"Well, ah what?" exclaimed Susan, with sharp impatient intonation.

"The judge," repeated Zebulon weakly. "Well, I bring him here—O Lor!" and Zebulon dashed for the door. He stopped at the sill and, pointing at the judge, added, "The judge, Sue, there he is!" Then he disappeared.

The judge was frozen into a dignified statue. He could see now that it was Susan, but he dared not. Suddenly he thought of Matilda. Ah, she would break the ice for him. Matilda! His face flushed.

"Ladies," he said in sepulchral tones, "will ye kindly inform yer widowed sister Matilda that I desire to see her? Alone," he added.

The sisters swept out of the room, confident that Zebulon and the judge had suddenly gone crazy. Then Matilda entered. She proffered her hand in welcome, and the judge seized it as a drowning man grasps at a straw. He held on. Here at least was something tangible.

And then—well, Susan was not half so tangible. Matilda!

Ten minutes later Zebulon peeked into the parlor. The judge was very close to Matilda, and he was holding her hands. Everything was very still.

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Zebulon.

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